

Endangered Species and Spaces

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4.9 Sandhill Crane: *Grus canadensis* (Linnaeus)

Order: *Gruiformes*
Family: *Gruidae*

Status

Global Rank: G5
Provincial Rank: S3B, SZN
COSEWIC: *G. c. tabida* Not at risk

Provincial Listing: [Blue list](#)



Distinguishing Features

Large heron-like birds, slate grey in colouration, black wing tips and (in adults) a reddish patch on the forehead and upper face. Most likely to be confused with the Great Blue Heron, but flies with neck outstretched, while herons fly with the neck curled back against the shoulders. Total length 86 -122 cm. (Godfrey, 1986).

Distribution

Columbia Basin: Southern Rocky Mountain Trench. Possibly only one or two breeding pairs.

British Columbia: Breeds in the interior from the north Okanagan north through most of the Central Interior Ecoprovince, locally in the Southern Rocky Mountain Trench, and in the Fort Nelson Lowland. On the coast, it breeds in the Fraser Lowland, on some central coast islands, on the Queen Charlotte Islands and probably on northern Vancouver Island. Occasionally, a few birds overwinter in coastal British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1990, Cannings et al. In prep.).

Global: Breeds in North America from w. Alaska across much of the Canadian Arctic to Hudson's Bay south to ne. California, Colorado, and Michigan. Also breeds in Siberia. There are four distinct populations of *G. c. tabida* in North America; those that occur in British Columbia winter mainly in Baja California, s. Texas to c. Mexico. *G.c. rowani* probably winter in New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. *G. c. canadensis* winter in s. California, Texas and n. Mexico. (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Habitat

The Sandhill Crane breeds in isolated bogs, marshes, swamps, and meadows with heavy emergent growth such as sedges, and bulrushes. Nesting wetlands tend to be secluded and free from human disturbance, and have suitable foraging habitat nearby. In British Columbia, nesting

wetlands tend to be surrounded by a narrow strip of meadow leading into coniferous forest. Forests are used for escape cover by young cranes and provide a buffer against disturbance (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Threats

Breeding population sizes are unknown but are estimated to be about 1500 pairs in the central interior, a few hundred pairs along the coast, and unknown numbers in the northeast. Isolated populations include 1-2 pairs in the East Kootenay Trench. Most populations are probably stable but data are lacking. The Fraser Lowland populations have declined significantly and are extremely endangered. South Okanagan populations have been extirpated (Cannings et al. In prep.).

In southern lowlands, populations have declined or disappeared as wetlands are converted or encroached in the face of urbanization and intensive agriculture. Elsewhere, threats are mainly from land use practices such as logging of forest around nesting wetlands, draining or ill-timed drawdowns of wetlands for agricultural purposes, and trampling of emergent vegetation by cattle. In some landscapes, clearcuts have been used for nesting. Natural mortality is estimated at 5% annually. Coyotes, Wolves, Common Ravens, Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, and Raccoons are potential significant predators of eggs or young (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Biology

Nests are large heaps of vegetation, usually built in emergent vegetation over water from a few cm to 1.5 m deep. Breeding habitat is widely distributed throughout the breeding range. Nesting has occurred at elevations from near sea level to 1200 metres. There are three main spring migration routes through British Columbia: across Juan de Fuca Strait to Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands, the Okanagan Valley through Quilchena/Knutsford/Kamloops to the central Chilcotin and on to the Bulkley/Kispiox valleys and Alaska, and through the Peace River and Fort Nelson areas and on to the Yukon and Alaska.

The Sandhill Crane has a clutch of two eggs that are incubated for 34 days. Often only one chick survives to fledge, after about 10 weeks. Eggs are laid from mid-April through May and young are fledged by August (Cannings et al. In prep.).



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